New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1957

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"West Side Story"

New York Post

September 27, 1957

TWO on the AISLE

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

Romeo and Juliet in a Gang War

To start with a sweeping understatement, "West Side Story" is far from being a regulation Broadway musical play. A somber tragedy of warring teen-age gangs in New York, it dramatizes its narrative to a large extent in terms of dance, and it parallels the plot of "Romeo and Juliet" without making a stunt of it. Its music is blithely unconcerned with tunes, and it is almost without comedy, save for a few scornful thrusts at the police and at theories about juvenile delinquency. In its opening at the Winter Garden last night, it had power and feeling.

It seemed to me both striking and impressive, and, thanks in large part to a moving and beautiful performance by Carol Lawrence as a Puerto Rican Juliet, it possesses notable emotional honesty. If I also admired rather more than I enjoyed it, this is because I thought Leonard Bernstein's score, admirable as it is, was just a trifle too lacking in warmth, while the ingenuity of the dances staged by Jerome Robbins revealed fine imagination without being always convincingly dramatic. But I am not denying the quality of distinction that is present.

The fact is that Mr. Robbins has done a remarkable job in staging "West Side Story." To say that he turns the two rival gangs, the Jets and the Sharks, into companies of ballet dancers might indicate a softening process that would weaken the starkness of his dramatic narrative, but, surprisingly, this is far from altogether true. The idea did bother me slightly at the start, but the choreography has been fused with the story so effectively that the ugliness and horror of the war to the death between the boys are never lost.

As for Mr. Bernstein's music, I should say that its mood lies somewhere between the sardonic bite of his score for "Candide" and his considerably more popular songs for "Wonderful Town." If it leans more in the direction of the former, it is because of what seemed to me a certain chilliness that didn't altogether capture the hot-bloodedness of grimly embattled youth in "West Side Story." But the vitality and the harshness of the musical tragedy's mood are there, and there can be little dispute about the vigor of the music.

The Book

The libretto provided by Arthur Laurents is entirely helpful. He never leans too heavily on the "Romeo and Juliet" parallel, but the story of the boy from the Jets and his doomed romance with the sister of the fiery leader of the Sharks, following his despairing effort to stop the feud between the gangs, is close enough to the tale of the Capulets and the Montagues, and it is touching and believable. As a matter of fact, the last few tragic minutes of the narrative are poignant to a degree almost unheard of in the popular musical theater.

The production is a fine one, and Oliver Smith's sets contribute greatly to the mood of the story. The casting and playing are admirable, too. Miss Lawrence not only sings and dances attractively but plays enchantingly. Larry Kert is excellent, if somewhat less moving, as the New York equivalent of Romeo, and Chita Rivera is of vast help as the lover of the heroine's brother. The grownups of the cast have little chance, but Art Smith, as a friendly druggist, and Arch Johnson, as a nasty cop, are effective. "West Side Story" adds to the dramatic power of the American musical theater.

"WEST SIDE STORY"

Musical in two acts based on a conception of Jerome Robbins; book by Arthur Laurents; music by Leonard Bernstein; lyrics by Stephen Sondheim; settings by Oliver Smith; costumes by Irene Sharaff; lighting by Jean Rosenthal; musical direction by Max Goberman; orchestrations by Mr. Bernstein with Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal; entire production staged and choreographed by Mr. Robbins; presented by Robert E. Griffith and Harold S. Prince by arrangement with Roger L. Stevens at the Winter Garden Theatre, September 26, 1957, with a cast headed by: Carol Lawrence, Larry Kert, Chita Rivera, Art Smith, Mickey Calin, Ken Le Roy, Lee Becker, Eddie Roll, David Winters, Tony Mordente, Arch Johnson and Grover Dale.

DAILY NEWS

September 27, 1957

'West Side Story' a Splendid and Super-Modern Musical Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The American theatre took a venturesome forward step when the firm of Griffith & Prince presented "West Side Story" at the Winter Garden last evening.

This is a bold new kind of musical theatre—a juke-box Manhattan opera. It is, to me, extraordinarily exciting. In it, the various fine skills of show business are put to new tests, and as a result a different kind of musical has emerged.

The story is, roughly, Shakespeare's recounting of the love and deaths of Romeo and Juliet. But the setting is today's Manhattan, and the manner of telling the story is a provocative and artful blend of music, dance and plot—and the music and the dancing are superb.

Superb Score

In this present-day version of the theatre's greatest romance, the Montagus and Capulets become young New York gangs, one native, the other Puerto Rican. The Romeo is a white boy, the Juliet a Puerto Rican girl. In the big fight switch-blade knives are used instead of swords. The apothecary who gave Romeo his fateful potion now is a mild druggist who mans his soda fountain and wonders what the younger generation is coming to. And the younger generation, even if it does indulge in one rumble which results in murder, is not nearly as blackhearted as current news stories might make us believe.

The music of "West Side Story" is by Leonard Bernstein, and it is superb—and splendidly played by an orchestra directed by Max Goberman. In it there is the drive, the bounce, the restlessness and the sweetness of our town. It takes up the American musical idiom where it was left when George Gershwin died. It is fascinatingly tricky and melodically beguiling, and it marks the progression of admirable composer.

The story, about the fundamentally innocent hoodlums of our town, is by Arthur Laurents, and it is a lovely and moving one. But Laurents is not alone in telling this story, for his collaborator is Jerome Robbins, the choreographer. Robbins and his superb young dancers carry the plot as much as the spoken words and lyrics do.

The lyrics, by Stephen Sondheim, have simple grace, and there is a lovely tribute by the sidewalk Romeo to his dusky girl, Maria. There is a really beautiful scene in which the boy and the girl go through a make-believe wedding in a shop for bridal clothing. And there is an uproariously funny one in which a so-called juvenile delinquent gets a going-over by all the authorities whose problem he is—the cop, the judge, the social worker and the psychiatrist. This young hoodlum manages to make his elders look pretty silly.

Wonderful Cast

The cast of "West Side Story" is, next to the music, the best part of the production. It is composed of young people of whom few have been heard. Carol Lawrence and Larry Kert carry the love story with effortless simplicity, and they sing beautifully. There are other engaging performances by Chita Rivera, Mickey Salin, Miss Lee Barker, Ken Le Roy and Art Smith (the druggist). But the company itself is the star of the show. These boys and girls sing, dance and act with such skill and sincerity that they bring the audience out of its seats and up on the stage with them—and the stage is not a stage, but this fascinating and fearful town of Manhattan.

And the settings by Oliver Smith and the costumes by Irene Sharaff are a perfect part of a perfect production.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
September 27, 1957

THEATER

'West Side Story'

By WALTER KERR

THE radioactive fallout from "West Side Story" must still be descending on Broadway this morning.

Director, choreographer, and idea-man Jerome Robbins has put together, and then blasted apart, the most savage, restless, electrifying dance patterns we've been exposed to in a dozen seasons.

The curtain rises on a silence, and a pause. It is the last silence and the last pause. Against an empty-eyed background of warehouse windows five or six blue-jacketed young delinquents, with the tribal-mark "Jets" scrawled across their taut shoulders, are lounging, waiting for the first faint whisper of violence.

Their impatience comes to life in their fingers. A snapping rhythm begins to tap out a warning of mayhem to come. Knees begin to itch, and move, under the lazy, overcast midsummer sky in Puerto-Rican New York.

The Sharks — equally young, equally sick with very old hatreds—appear from the alleyways in twos and threes. There is a sneer, a hiss, a tempting and tantalizing thrust of an arm, and then — with a powerhouse downbeat from the orchestra pit—the sorry and meaningless frenzy is on. From this moment the show rides with a catastrophic roar over the spider-web fire - escapes, the shadowed trestles, and the plain dirt battlegrounds of a big city feud.

Mr. Robbins never runs out of his original explosive life-force. Though the essential images are always the same—two spitting groups of people advancing with bared teeth and clawed fists upon one another—there is fresh excitement in the next debacle, and the next. When a gang leader advises his cohorts to play it "Cool," the intolerable tension between an effort at control and the instinctive drives of these potential killers is stingingly graphic. When the knives come out, and bodies begin to fly wildly through space under buttermilk clouds, the sheer visual excitement is breathtaking.

Our choreographer also knows how, and when, to pull back for brief lyrical contrast in the course of this Romeo-and-Juliet rampage through darkened streets. He can, when things are at their worst, let his star-crossed American lovers slip imaginatively away from their dingy bedroom into free and open heights from which all earthly pressures have disappeared. He can give his Puerto-Rican girl and his American boy ("he's an American who's really a Polack") a soft, lingering, plaintive good-night between neighborhood snarls and slashes.

He has been almost sacrificially assisted in this macabre and murderous onslaught of movement by composer Leonard Bernstein. Mr. Bernstein has permitted himself a few moments of graceful, lingering melody: in a yearning "Maria," in the hushed falling line of "Tonight," in the wistful declaration of "I Have a Love."

But for the most part he has served the needs of the onstage threshing-machine, setting the fierce beat that fuses a gymnasium dance, putting a mocking insistence behind taunts at a policeman, dramatizing the footwork rather than lifting emotions into song. When hero Larry Kert is stomping out the visionary insistence of "Something's Coming" both music and tumultuous story are given their due. Otherwise it's the danced narrative that takes urgent precedence.

Which brings us to the fact that there is another side to "West Side Story." The show is, in general, not well sung. It is rushingly acted. (The dramatic postures are rarely varied.) And it is, apart from the spine-tingling velocity of the dances, almost never emotionally affecting. Perhaps the echoes of another "Romeo and Juliet" are too firm; the people often seem to be behaving as they do because of arbitrary commands from a borrowed plot. Perhaps the near-absence of comedy whittles away the substance of ordinary humanity. Perhaps these teen-age gangsters are too ferocious, too tawdry, too intent upon grinding their teeth to interest us compassionately for two and one-half hours. They terrify us in their drive; they do not touch us in their bewilderment. The evening hurtles headlong past whatever endearing simplicities may be hidden in Arthur Laurent's text for Stephen Sondheim's lyrics.

In the brilliance of its determination, Mr. Robbins' handiwork should be seen. This is the show that could have danced all night, and nearly did. But the dancing is it. Don't look for laughter or—for that matter—tears.

The New York Times
September 27, 1957

Theatre: The Jungles of the City

'West Side Story' Is at Winter Garden

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH the material is horrifying, the workmanship is admirable.

Gang warfare is the material of "West Side Story," which opened at the Winter Garden last evening, and very little of the hideousness has been left out. But the author, composer and ballet designer are creative artists. Pooling imagination and virtuosity, they have written a profoundly moving show that is as ugly as the city jungles and also pathetic, tender and forgiving.

Arthur Laurents has written the story of two hostile teen-age gangs fighting for supremacy amid the tenement houses, corner stores and bridges of the West Side. The story is a powerful one, partly, no doubt, because Mr. Laurents has deliberately given it the shape of "Romeo and Juliet." In the design of "West Side Story" he has powerful allies. Leonard Bernstein has composed another one of his nervous, flaring scores that capture the shrill beat of life in the streets. And Jerome Robbins, who has directed the production, is also its choreographer.

Since the characters are kids of the streets, their speech is curt and jeering. Mr. Laurents has provided the raw material of a tragedy that occurs because none of the young people involved understands what is happening to them. And his contribution is the essential one. But it is Mr. Bernstein and Mr. Robbins who orchestrate it. Using music and movement they have given Mr. Laurents' story passion and depth and some glimpses of unattainable glory. They have pitched into it with personal conviction as well as the skill of accomplished craftsmen.

In its early scenes of gang skirmishes, "West Side Story" is facile and a little forbidding—the shrill music and the taut dancing movement being harsh and sinister. But once Tony of the Jets gang sees Maria of the Sharks gang, the magic of an immortal story takes hold. As Tony, Larry Kert is perfectly cast, plain in speech and manner; and as Maria, Carol Lawrence, maidenly soft and glowing, is perfectly cast also. Their balcony scene on the firescape of a dreary tenement is tender and affecting. From that moment on, "West Side Story" is an incandescent piece of work that finds odd bits of beauty amid the rubbish of the streets.

Everything in "West Side Story," is of a piece. Everything contributes to the total impression of wildness, ecstasy and anguish. The astringent score has moments of tranquillity and rapture, and occasionally a touch of sardonic humor. And the ballets convey the things that Mr. Laurents is inhibited from saying because the characters are so inarticulate. The hostility and suspicion between the gangs, the glory of the nuptials, the terror of the rumble, the devastating climax — Mr. Robbins has found the patterns of movement that express these parts of the story.

Most of the characters, in fact, are dancers with some images of personality lifted out of the whirlwind—characters sketched on the wing. Like everything also in "West Side Story," they are admirable. Chita Rivera in a part equivalent to the Nurse in the Shakespeare play; Ken Le Roy as leader of The Sharks; Mickey Calin as leader of The Jets; Lee Becker as a hobbledehoy girl in one gang—give terse and vigorous performances.

Everything in "West Side Story" blends—the scenery by Oliver Smith, the costumes by Irene Sharaff, the lighting by Jean Rosenthal. For this is one of those occasions when theatre people, engrossed in an original project, are all in top form. The subject is not beautiful. But what "West Side Story" draws out of it is beautiful. For it has a searching point of view.

Daily Mirror
September 27, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN'S THEATRE

'West Side Story' A Sensational Hit!

"West Side Story" is a timely re-telling of the Romeo and Juliet legend against the raw violence of youthful gang wars. It has earthy humor and simple beauty. And, best of all, it has tremendous drive. It moves with the speed of a switchblade knife thrust.

The Arthur Laurents book is lean and wiry. It never uses two words where one will do. It is an excellent framework for an extraordinary score by Leonard Bernstein, biting and tender lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, and magnificent staging by Jerome Robbins. It is a felicitous blending of all facets of theatre.

•

THE NATIVE Jets resented the intrusion of the Puerto Rican Sharks into their territory. Conflict was inevitable. So they met at a party in a neighborhood gym to name time, place and weapons for the big "rumble." Tony, pal of the Jet leader, met and fell in love with Maria, sister of the Sharks' boss.

Sensible Tony sought to restrict the action to fists. Despite his good intentions, things got out of hand. In the heat of battle, he murdered his betrothed's brother, and was subsequently shot to death by a vengeful member of the Sharks as he was on the verge of eloping with Maria.

Laurents, Bernstein and Sondheim made no compromises with popular taste. They have shunned the happy ending of the average Broadway song - and - dancer. Laurents, as a sort of off-stage Mercutio, says in effect, "A plague on both your houses." He has no sympathy for juvenile delinquents. He lashes out at their jungle code, their defiance of society.

There are no stars in "West Side Story," but several will spring from it. Carol Lawrence is lovely as the Puerto Rican Maria who gives her heart to a first-generation American, only to lose him in a pointless and primitive feud. Larry Kert is manly and engaging as her unfortunate lover.

CHITA RIVERA, as a sinuous and fiery Latin, lights up like a handful of Fourth-of-July sparklers. Mickey Calin, who will probably hate us for suggesting that he looks a lot like Elvis Presley, is perfect as a Manhattan Tybalt. If he doesn't watch out, the Hollywood scouts will be around with contracts.

Salutes are also due Ken LeRoy, Art Smith, Lee Becker, Eddie Roll, David Winters, Tony Mordente, Arch Johnson and Grover Dale for distinguished service in other roles. In fact, all the kids in the large cast merit appreciative bows.

Oliver Smith and Irene Sharaff have designed atmospheric settings and costumes. Max Goberman, on the podium, gives a dynamic reading of Bernstein's exciting music. But the real hero of the evening is director-choreographer Robbins. His dances talk. They advance the action with the momentum of an inter-continental missile.

Robert E. Griffith and Harold S. Prince, the hit boys, have another sensational smash on their hands. They've come to bat four times—with "Pajama Game," "Damn Yankees," "New Girl in Town" and "West Side Story"—and whacked out grand-slammers for a perfect record.

The first-nighters rocked the Winter Garden's venerable rafters with salvos of spontaneous cheers and applause. And that was not surprising for "West Side Story" is a superlative musical. A chiller, a thriller, as up-to-the-minute as tomorrow's headlines.

Journal-American
September 27, 1957

Music Magnificent In Overwhelming Hit

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE WINTER GARDEN WILL NOT be for rent for a long time. Last night the new tenants, some people involved in a thing called "West Side Story" took possession and while they are all very young I believe they can stay there until they are all very old. This is an overwhelming hit.

This is a story with music, but I do not call it a musical because it strikes me as an entirely new form. There are arias, duets, choral numbers; there is ballet and jive, and there is an appealing libretto. It is the most exciting thing that has come to town since "My Fair Lady."

Here is one of the rare blends of talent that obviously struck no snags. The idea, a rather loose modernization of the Romeo and Juliet theme, was conceived by Jerome Robbins. It was transmitted by him to Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents and a young man named Stephen Sondheim, and together they devised book, music, lyrics and choreography which should remain for many seasons as the most fortunate union in the history of money.

Magic Fabric

Taking it from the top I would say that Mr. Bernstein is responsible for the true importance of the piece, for the music is always magnificent. There are passages worthy of a modern opera, there are also numbers which would do credit to a "pop" musical, and the incidental phrases which highlight the scenes are memorable.

The story by Mr. Laurents is only wonderful. He has captured the talk of the juveniles, or a reasonable facsimile, and woven it into a magic fabric. These are crazy, mixed-up kids, but you go with them. A so-called "American" gang isn't going to let a Puerto Rican gang roam their streets. But then, of course, an American falls in love with a Puerto Rican girl. You can take it from there—Montague and Capulet.

Young Mr. Sondheim has gone all the way with the mood in his lyrics. His ballads are the lament of the sincere, and he can come up with the most hilarious travesty of our times in, "Gee, Officer Krupke"—a plaint which should settle the problem of juvenile delinquency forever.

Something New

Then there is Jerome Robbins, the old master, who directed and did the dances. This should be his monument, for there has never been a happier integration, a more sensitive blending of story, song and movement. Many of the most exciting moments of the evening are told in dance, and they are superb.

This brings us down to a chap named Oliver Smith, credited with the sets. This is his best. Without stopping the action he lowers fire escapes from the sky, changes a Bronx backyard to a Never-Never Land, and without pretention creates the atmosphere of our sinister streets and playgrounds.

Oh, yes, the players. These are mostly kids you never heard of, like Carol Lawrence, Larry Kert, Chita Rivera, Mickey Calin and Ken Le Roy. But they can do everything. They dance and sing much better than necessary, and they all have that wonderful quality of seeming to be having a good time. Miss Lawrence and Mr. Kert, who handle the best of the ballads may not have operatic backgrounds, but I prefer them as they are.

"West Side Story" is something quite new in the theatre, and it is just great.

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

September 27, 1957

Love and Hate Make Beauty

By FRANK ASTON.

It came right out of urban America, out of the venom generated between races jammed festeringly together. It said frankly that back alley people can do little more than hate because hatred is all they can feel and love is a thing that has hardly a chance to be born. It scoffed at our era's patented pyschology and chromium-plated panaceas and it scorned the over-educated ignoramuses professing to offer cures for the eroding evils of poverty and racism.

This was "West Side Story," opening last night at the Winter Garden, with book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, direction and choreography by Jerome Robbins—and what an eye-popping, ear-soothing, conscience-busting combination it was. Without a flick of hesitation it waded deeply into the ugliness of New York's Puerto Rican problem, and at the same time, by the magic of good music and artistic movement, it built up moments of theatrical beauty.

Except for a few brief instances near the end, when there seemed to be some groping, it moved swiftly from scene to scene, from mood to mood. This was its speed in a mechanical sense.

Its progress in the matter of narrative was even brisker. The Bernstein music possesses power to push the story forward and the Robbins dances are not interpolated ballets but outbursts of integrated narrative action. In fact, one spectator left the house wondering if there hadn't been more dancing than anything else in this show. If so, that was good because there couldn't be too much of the illustrative wonders set forth by Mr. Robbins and his boys and girls.

This resplendent blend of music and dance, humor and tragedy, tells how a Puerto Rican girl and a native boy are enmeshed in upper Manhattan's hoodlumism and rumbling. The climax must inevitably be a matter of grief, but as events proceed there is no end of fun for the customers out front. This sounds impossible. But it works.

It's fun to have delinquents sing and act their notion of how idiotic they consider juvenile court judges, psychiatrists and social workers. And it's a stream of pleasure to hear youngsters singing numbers like "Tonight," "Maria," "One Hand, One Heart," "I Feel Pretty" and "Somewhere."

The performers are new to Broadway. But there was star stuff falling last night. You'll be hearing more of Carol Lawrence, Larry Kert, Chita Rivera, Mickey Calin and Ken Le Roy. And probably of others in the nimble, handsomely costumed, deftly staged company.

"West Side Story" is far more than a Romeo meowing to a Juliet on a fire escape. It is a marvel peculiar to this country. Here we breed evil in our cities, but here we also parade a Bernstein and a Robbins so that a big part of this tortured world may say, "America must be proud of boys like those." And theater-going Americans may reply, "You're darn tootin' we are."

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews

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"Four Winds"

The New York Times

September 26, 1957

Theatre: 'Four Winds'

Drama About Wealthy Opens at the Cort

By BROOKS ATKINSON

EVEN the rich can suffer, according to Thomas W. Phipps.

In "Four Winds," which opened at the Cort last evening, he considers at considerable length the problem of a girl who cannot escape a life of wealth, luxury and indulgence. As Herman Mankiewicz once remarked about the fabulously successful playwright in "Merrily We Roll Along:" "How did the son-of-gun get in this jam?"

Mr. Phipps' wretch is the glamorous Davina Mars. At the moment she is pigging it in her lavish Palm Beach estate, whimsically dubbed "Four Winds." But she has houses in England and all over Europe, a ranch in Wyoming, a four-motor plane with permanent staff, an ocean-going yacht that sleeps multitudes, three ex-husbands and an attractive blackguard whom she is about to marry as her fourth.

•

It takes a writer to convince her that she is unhappy. Trained to observe life and to analyze people, he sees at once that she is the prisoner of her wealth and the victim of the staff that has fastened on her. She needs reality, he says. She needs contact with the simple things. She needs to get away from it all, he points out with the lucidity of a thinking man.

She is fascinated with his constructive criticism and humbly accepts it. But do you think that the rich can shake off the burden of their wealth and cut loose from their friends? Don't you see that the decay is inside, that they really like champagne, gay dinner parties, extravagant dances, travel and enjoyment? For once, it seems, the writer has gotten outside his bailiwick.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Phipps' writer has just stopped off in Palm Beach on his way to Hollywood. He will be in a good situation about a week from now. Confidential will pay him well for the little items he has picked up in Florida.

•

"Four Winds" has been elegantly produced in keeping with its social station. Donald Oenslager, the scene designer, has wrapped it up in the sunny and flowery splendor of Palm Beach. And Guthrie McClintic has directed it fastidiously.

A smartly dressed troupe of handsome actors (gowns designed by the most illustrious couturières) sympathetically examine Davina's unique problem. Ann Todd as the wistfully gay heroine and Peter Cookson as the fascinating blackguard about to marry her whirl and pirouette through Mr. Phipps' masquerade with grace and intelligence.

"FOUR WINDS"

Play in three acts and five scenes by Thomas W. Phipps; staged by Guthrie McClintic; designed by Donald Oenslager; presented by Worthington Miner and Kenneth Wagg at the Cort Theatre, September 25, 1957. The cast:

Lee.....Harry Shaw Lowe
Doctor Cazalet...Harry Mehaffey
Gage.....Conrad Nagel
Audrey Pender.....Luella Gear
Axel Doorn.....Carl Esmond
Garrett Scott.....Peter Cookson
Jeremy Paget.....Robert Hardy
Mademoiselle..Ludmilla Toretzka
Davina Mars.....Ann Todd
Tad Willis.....James Rennie

Robert Hardy plays the wholesome writer with an eagerness that is nevertheless well-bred. Luella Gear, Conrad Nagel, Carl Esmond, James Rennie, Ludmilla Toretzka and Harry Mehaffey pleasantly represent the evil, flair and cynicism of the upper classes.

Despite their wit and skill, "Four Winds" is soap opera. Jolly boring, too.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

September 26, 1957

Ann Todd Opens In 'Four Winds'

By FRANK ASTON.

It isn't the acting. That can't be what's wrong with Thomas W. Phipps' "Four Winds" which Guthrie McClintic staged for Worthington Miner and Kenneth Wagg at the Cort last evening.

Luella Gear is in it. She describes herself as "one of the last of the sybarites," meaning she is an overfed, overdressed old bag who's going to continue to get all she can for nothing. Miss Gear has nothing of importance to say, but anything from her gifted mouth sounds fine.

There are two as actory actors as you'd care to find. One is Peter Cookson as a bounder making a career of "unboring the bored rich" and plotting to try for his peak stakes by marrying one of the world's richest and dopiest women. With him is Conrad Nagel as an enjoyably villainous conniver in the silly heiress' household.

And there is England's Ann Todd, to whose looks, vocal qualities and stamina in long speeches this member of last night's gathering vows approximately eternal devotion.

Tediously Talky Affair.

In addition there are able workers like Harry Mehaffey, Carl Esmond, Robert Hardy, Ludmilla Toretzka, James Rennie and Harry Shaw Lowe. What they're called on to do in this tediously talky affair cannot be recorded as historic. But while they're doing it in Donald Oenslager's patio at Palm Beach they look attractive. No, it can't be the acting that has scuffed up the venture.

"Four Winds" is concerned with an American female who has a four-engine plane, a yacht, a house in virtually any spot you care to mention—and a growing yen for alcohol so she may forget that three men have married her for money and a fourth is about to do the same.

The girl's brain cells are so soggy from countless splashes of champagne that she can't take a stand for what she knows is right. In her case right would consist of going alone to her Wyoming ranch, doing her own cooking, drying out from all that wine and eventually becoming—well what?

Aren't Many Left.

She started as the No. 1 Glamor Girl, so she can't return to that deplorable state. She might become a sober, TV-watching taxpayer, but who wants that after years in the liveliest play places? What would she want to become?

To get to the point, who cares? The only folks who might give a whoop would be those buying four-engine planes, staying plastered on champagne and getting married about every third Tuesday.

And there aren't many like that left.

Daily Mirror

September 26, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN'S THEATRE

'Four Winds' First Ill Wind of Season

"Four Winds" is the title of a highfalutin melodrama which Worthington Miner and Kenneth Wagg installed in the Cort Theatre last night. It is also the name of a gaudy palazzo in Palm Beach owned by one Davina Mars. She's a poor little rich girl with a yen for the bottle and the boys.

She's about to buy another hubby when up pops a young novelist from England, loaded with ideals but not very smart. Sir Galahad would send the bored dipso off to find a new life on a ranch in the West, far from the parasites who prosper from her weaknesses. But he soon discovers that she likes to be bled by leeches.

It looked for a while as though Davina's hard-boiled press agent, Tad Willis, was going to save her from another costly marriage, for he had the goods on the latest candidate for her heart, hand and millions, that British bounder, Garrett Scott. However, Willis spent so much time paying off a blackmailing pair from Paris that he failed to arrive back at Four Winds in the nick of time.

THE NEW ARRIVAL is from the atelier of Thomas W. Phipps, socialite TV scripter. We suspect that he started out to write a bitter, satiric and searching high comedy after the manner of Somerset Maugham, only to get bogged down in aimless melodramatic mazes that lead nowhere.

Once in a while, Phipps tosses off a bright and brittle line a la Freddy Lonsdale. And he's roughed out a set of cynical characters who might have resembled the bawdy belles, beaux and fawning sycophants of the Restoration, had he put some blood in their veins.

Unfortunately, his people are as lifeless as the figures in Mme. Tussaud's Waxworks. You endure them, and are never moved by them. And he hasn't been able to etch a single dominant personality on which to focus his play.

As for the dialogue, it bounces about stage like raindrops scattered by errant gusts.

The usually expert Guthrie McClintic, on this occasion, has not been of much assistance in giving point to the proceedings. From such skillful players as Ann Todd, Peter Cookson, Luella Gear, Conrad Nagel, Robert Hardy, Carl Esmond and James Rennie, he has gotten nothing better than pedestrian performances. His customary magic is missing.

DONALD OENSLAGER has designed a gem of a tasteless setting. It's one of those busy beavers that makes you think you're on an ocean liner that's really rolling and plunging. After a couple of hours, it had us reaching into our pocket for a vial of dramamine tablets that weren't there.

Since "Four Winds" blew in a new season, we had hoped to report this morning that it is an emotional gale. But, truth to tell, it is as empty as the life of Davina Mars. And that spells vacuum in any showshop.

Journal American

September 26, 1957

Play About the Wealthy Enriched by Ann Todd

By JOHN McCLAIN

IN THE FIRST IMPOSING OPENING of the new drama season the fresh production team of Worthington Miner and Kenneth Wagg presented at the Cort Theatre last night a play by Thomas W. Phipps called "Four Winds."

Ann Todd, a British actress of acknowledged stature was making her bow to the Broadway stage, and she was joined by a brilliant cast, including Peter Cookson, Luella Gear, Conrad Nagel, Robert Hardy, Carl Esmond and James Rennie. Direction by Guthrie McClintic, sets by Donald Oenslager.

To estimate what came out one might well recall the sentence the late Scott Fitzgerald wrote in the opening paragraph of "Rich Boy," something I have cherished through the years. It reads: "The rich . . . are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful."

This, in a rather meandering way, is the synthesis of Mr. Phipps' play. He has chosen as his heroine one of the richest young ladies in the world, and he has endeavored to show that as of now she has been inescapably trapped in a net of sychophants. Then comes the young Lochinvar, out of the East, but we realize in the end that it is too late. Her life has been reduced to a pattern, and even she is powerless to make the break for freedom.

Hinge of Success

Whether the play succeeds or not is a matter as simple as 1-2-3 (million dollars, of course). Are we able to accept the fact that the girl with the money has a serious problem; do we care if it's solved?

I believe that due to a monumental performance by Miss Todd, many of us will care. The drama is a slow starter, and it isn't until the middle of the second act that the cauldron boils, but from there on I was captured and rewarded. Along the line it has many touches of life among the very wealthy that are both amusing and legitimate.

There is a notable scene with the trusted major domo (Conrad Nagel) trying to work out a proper amount of "pocket money" to be bestowed on the groom-to-be (Peter Cookson). There is a beautifully-played confessional by Miss Todd which bolstered my belief that people with more than $8 also have troubles.

Superior Cast

On the subject of Miss Todd—she establishes herself here as an enormously talented addition to the local scene. Peter Cookson is a magnificently suave and sneaky fortune hunter, and Conrad Nagel is somehow unexpectdly skillful in the role of Miss Todd's secretary.

Luella Gear, Carl Esmond and James Rennie have their own captivating moments in Donald Oenslager's plush reproduction of a Palm Beach mansion.

I doubt that "Four Winds" will prove to be a sensational success, but it has brought us a thoughtful consideration of "The Rich." It has also brought us Ann Todd, for which we should all be appreciative.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
September 26, 1957

THEATER

'Four Winds'

By WALTER KERR

"FOUR WINDS," the new vale of tears at the Cort, is what might be called a "suddenly" play.

That is to say, when a very understanding and very British young novelist clasps his hands over one knee, leans forward intensely, and explains to miserable millionairess Ann Todd how he managed to straighten out his own life, he says, "I suddenly woke up one morning — and realized I'd had it."

And when Miss Todd's ever-reliable public relations expert is called in to tidy up what promises to be the lady's nastiest marital mess to date, he bridles haughtily: "I've been cleaning up for her for years — and suddenly I'm sick of it."

And when the distraught lady in question lurches shakily to center stage to review her gay, misspent youth and utter a malediction upon it, she is caught up in the same whirlpool: I didn't want to be a freak — but suddenly I was."

* * *

Dawn is always breaking for these very rich, very dishonest, very-well tailored residents of Palm Beach ("In my drawing-room," says sybarite Luella Gear, "you will find no profundity — only beautiful women, beautiful men, and beautiful clothes"). They stand with their trousers creased, their scarves knotted, their feet slightly apart in just that stance that would keep them upright on board ship in a slight breeze. Their brows knit, their voices break a bit, and they discover things about themselves.

* * *

In this process of discovery, certain mildly interesting theatrical effects are arrived at. You'll notice, for instance, that a clinical, and reasonably chilling, atmosphere is at last spun round the poor little heiress who is completely at the mercy of a devoted aunt (really a parasite), a private secretary (really a warden), a solicitous doctor (really a moocher given to filling his cigarette-case out of her private stock), and a fiance (really a cad). A kind of hollow helplessness does seem to filter across the glass-paneled living-room in which our girl has never—really—lived.

* * *

In addition, actress Ann Todd is arresting at every twitch and turn. Miss Todd is called upon to seem two or three different persons at various stages of the play, and she has a glossy, brittle, honorably appealing face for each of them. When she is shaking her honey-colored hair in attempted defiance, the unexpected spunk is convincing. When she begins to chew a nail clear off her finger immediately after an impassioned assault by rogue Peter Cookson, the image of a fragile, uncertain, close-to-crackup incompetent is equally vivid. The lines may be literary-juicy, but the lady has a sound of her own to put momentary life in them.

She is generally very well supported, too. Peter Cookson, letting cigarette smoke drift from his nostrils as he calculates successive moves, is a believably menacing, plausibly insinuating suitor. In a brief appearance as the public-relations chap, James Rennie stamps a bulldog tenacity on a conventional figure. Luella Gear need only lower her eyes and let her lips drop open in a delicate sneer to extract every ounce of high-handed humor from author Thomas W. Phipps' occasionally caustic lines. Conrad Nagel, Carl Esmond and Robert Hardy do not miss a single natty nuance.

* * *

But the language is frightfully tony. "It was a very gay season in Rome that year," they keep saying. "He looked at me," Miss Todd reports, "with the blackest, softest eyes I'd ever known."

"There's a stubborn streak in you, Paget."

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"I like that."

And it's all rather unreal. Suddenly.

DAILY NEWS
September 26, 1957

'Four Winds,' Huffing & Puffing, Works Itself into Faint Breeze

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There almost always is a story in the story of the poor little rich girl, but playwright Thomas W. Phipps has had a difficult time getting to it in "Four Winds," which was presented at the Cort Theatre last evening.

There is much to the advantage of the drama, including some able or attractive actors, a luxurious setting designed by Donald Oenslager and a third act which gets moving. But the advantages are outweighed by the disadvantage, which is that the play is static during most of the first two acts.

Phipps, as a dramatist, has neglected to get going on a story. Instead of making things happen on the stage, he allows his characters to talk at length about themselves and to tell what did happen to them once. As a playgoer, I am more interested in seeing what is happening to the characters now than in hearing what happened long ago.

Two Slow Acts

For two acts, the playwright establishes his people—an unbelievably wealthy young woman and the corps of followers who have fastened themselves upon her. These include a luxury-loving aunt, a conniving male secretary, an incompetent personal physician, one of several ex-husbands and a new fortune-hunting suitor.

The setting is artist Oenslager's idea of the ultimate in luxury in Palm Beach, and he could have given Addison Mizner a couple of tips had he been old enough at the time. Into this house, one of many owned by the poor little rich girl, comes a misplaced guest. He's just a weekend guest and doesn't want anything. So he is the one who can persuade the poor little rich girl that she should ditch her camp-followers and lead her own life. He almost does this, but he doesn't quite swing it, and this is what makes the third act of the play better than the other two.

Attractive Miss Todd

The central figure is played by Ann Todd, a slender British blonde known here in the movies, who is physically attractive and attractively costumed but limited in vocal gradations. She either talks soft or loud and that is all.

The company includes Conrad Nagel as the calculating secretary, Louella Gear as the aunt, Carl Esmond as an ex-husband, Peter Cookson as the new suitor and Robert Hardy as the week end guest. They all play well enough—particularly Cookson, a sexy fortune-hunter. Somewhere in the second act James Rennie breezes in for three tough and cynical minutes as the rich girl's public relations counselor, and the breeze is welcome but too brief.

New York Post

September 26, 1957

TWO on the AISLE

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

Joys and Sorrows of the Wealthy

A lot of people have been saying lately that they were tired of plays about the poor and lowly and wanted a few sagas of the debonair rich. Well, Thomas W. Phipps has answered their call by giving them a work called "Four Winds," in which the heroine is one of the world's wealthiest girls, everybody is dashing and immaculately dressed, and most of the talk is of yachts, private airplanes and the glamor spots of Europe and Florida. Yet, with all its lavish background, the play, as presented last night at the Cort, seemed too hollow for comfort.

Indeed, there is considerable doubt that even Mr. Phipps is convinced that all the theater needs is beautiful people in a handsome Oenslager setting conversing in cultured tones. Although he is clearly fascinated by the expensive and sophisticated existence of the upper classes, he is also something of a moralist, and, while he is not averse to relishing the joys of wealth and travel, he is careful to point out in ringing terms that the social life can be shallow and predatory and that no one can be unhappier than a poor little rich girl.

So he offers us as a pathetic example of the possible sorrows of inherited millions the case of luckless Davina Mars, who had beauty, a press agent, estates all over the globe, and a number of ex-husbands. The particular target of conscienceless fortune hunters, she simply couldn't resist the wiles of one of the most artful of the species, and, although she was almost persuaded to rebel by an upright young English author, she was so dominated by selfish parasites and her own weakness for luxury that her revolt was but momentary.

While I'm sure that the playwright is in earnest about his stern moralizing, it appears that he is as ambivalent concerning the pleasures and trials of luxury as his heroine. The result is a kind of eat-your-cake-and-have-it attitude toward his narrative. He hasn't written a boring play, and there is one scene, in which the girl's press agent sees through the handsome fortune hunter, that has dramatic force. But Mr. Phipps is so mixed up between his ethical lesson and his admiration for the international set that neither aspect gets anywhere.

It is possible to imagine a dramatist taking this same scenario and making a sardonic, devastating play out of it. And Mr. Phipps has at least given his narrative its honestly sardonic conclusion. But it seems to me that up until that point he has been so superficial in his treatment of the theme, and so mixed between disapproval and his tendency toward admiration, that he might just as well have gone on and let his heroine run off with the upright Briton for a happy ending. As it is, he is likely to give dramatic satisfaction to no one.

The acting is excellent. Ann Todd, the English actress making her local debut as the rich girl, has the proper combination of rebellion and weakness, and Robert Hardy is believable and engaging as the decent young man. Peter Cookson has the right charm and guile as the fortune hunter, while Luella Gear and Conrad Nagel as a couple of parasites and Carl Esmond as an ex-husband are just right, and James Rennie dominates his scene as the indignant press agent brilliantly. But "Four Winds" is trapped in its own hollowness.

"Mask and Gown"

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

September 11, 1957

Females Are Funnier Than Mr. Jones Thinks

By JOHN CHAPMAN

An evening with T. C. Jones such as the one I spent last night at the John Golden Theatre strengthens an opinion I have held since very young manhood that the best impersonators of females are females.

Jones was funny a year ago when he appeared as Tallulah Bankhead in "New Faces." He still is amusing, and his show, "Mask and Gown," is artfully and tastefully put together. It has some chirrupy two-piano music by Dorothea Freitag and Arthur Siegel, and the stagewaits are engagingly covered by four dancers, Betty Carr, Gaby Monet, John Smolko and Rod Strong.

Who's Funnier?

But, as last evening progressed and Jones appeared in guise after guise, I reached the conclusion that Ethel Merman is funnier as Ethel Merman than Jones is. The same goes for Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Mae West, Judy Holliday, Ruth Etting and all the others Jones impersonates. Particularly Marilyn Monroe. How can anybody ever hope to top Miss Monroe's caricature of herself?

But Jones works manfully at his task. He manages to exaggerate enough of the mannerisms, facial expressions and vocal tricks of his subjects to make his impersonations recognizable, and now and then his make-believe has wit and satirical bite.

The show is a friendly and modest one. I don't suppose it could afford to hire Miss Monroe to do an impersonation of T. C. Jones—but it's an idea.

"MASK AND GOWN"

Musical divertissement with musical numbers staged and choreographed by Jim Russell; continuity by Ronny Graham and Sidney Carroll; music and lyrics by Mr. Graham, June Carroll, Arthur Siegel and Dorothea Freitag; lighting by Lee Watson, production conceived and under direction of Leonard Sillman; presented by Mr. Sillman and Bryant Haliday at the John Golden Theatre, September 10, 1957. The principals: T. C. Jones, Betty Carr, Gaby Monet, John Smolko and Rod Strong.

The New York Times

September 11, 1957

Theatre: 'Mask and Gown'

T. C. Jones Heads Cast at the John Golden

By BROOKS ATKINSON

COME leave this fancy way, said one of Ben Jonson's contemporaries who wanted less art and more nature in literature for the stage. Three centuries later, however, it turns out that Ben Jonson had been okay all the time.

Three centuries from now it may appear that T. C. Jones is okay in his extended mummery entitled "Mask and Gown," which opened at the John Golden last evening.

In the meantime it is this department's opinion that the fancy and the caprice of the first hour and a half make a cloying diet in the theatre. Come leave this fancy way and get down to business.

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For Mr. Jones is an uncommonly talented female impersonator who put a gay look on "New Faces of 1956." He astonished the town—one, by being an expert impersonator of female juggernauts, and two, by turning out to be a man when he took off his wig at the end of the show.

In the last half-hour of "Mask and Gown" he repeats his triumph of last year by sticking to the original last. Since we know how cunningly he can recapture Tallulah's trombone tones and hobble-de-hoy gait, it is not surprising to find his "Tallulah as Cleopatra" entertaining. But it is pleasant to find him equally expert, though more subtle and adroit, in recapturing the starry-eyed gleam of Judy Holliday as Portia, the willowy wonder of Marilyn Monroe as Ophelia, the condescending swagger of Mae West as Kate and the arid speaking of Katharine Hepburn as Rosalind. When he applies his talents to specific subjects, he is in great form, to say nothing of fettle.

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But his satirical portraits are not voluminous enough to fill an entire evening. Conspiring with two young women dancers and two young men dancers, conspiring also with writers, piano players, scene and costume designers, lighting genii, directors, supervisors and production associates, he has embarked on a coy and complicated phantasmagoria that is the American equivalent of the British "Cranks" of last year, and equally wearing.

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It is the major part of the program. It skips through TV, Hollywood of yesteryear, old songs, old dances, sardonic production numbers and anything else his writers and composers can think of at the moment. Mr. Jones and his four associates are up to their ears in whimsey.

But impersonations, male or female, cannot cover that much territory. They are tart interludes in revues or variety shows. Last year Mr. Jones, a highly-polished egghead when his wig is off, was perfectly spotted in a varied entertainment. He did not have to be so fanciful for such an unconscionable length of time.

Journal-American

September 11, 1957

Solid Shrieks Welcome T.C. To the Boards

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE best female impersonator making a legitimate living at it today is Mr. T. C. Jones, and last night at the John Golden Theatre he opened in a small revue called "Mask and Gown" which he entirely dominates.

It is a tenuous and courageous thing to attempt. Working in a night club is one thing. But to get an audience into a formal theatre and endeavor, with the aid of four friends and a couple of pianos, to keep them more than moderately amused is a large challenge. I must admit that I am a Jones fan, but I think he brought it off. I had a mostly good time.

The pattern for the evening is unpretentious and workable. There are four young people, nimble dancers, acceptable singers and amiable actors, who fly about the premises to set the stage for Mr. Jones's various specialties.

Style In Songs

Some of this embroidery is good. Some is downright dreary. And even the mighty T. C. cannot be expected to save the occasion on each of something like two dozen different attempts. But there is a lot of ingenuity in evidence. The pace is always swift and assured and the star has the ability to give some redeeming aside or bit of business even to the most lethargic situation.

It seemed to me that the evening reached its heights with such first-act numbers as "Don't Give Up the Ship," a rousing consideration of certain styles in musical comedy behavior and with T. C.'s interpretation of song delineators through the years. The last one, rock 'n roll, of course, should at least set the juke boxes back a few nickels hereabouts.

The second stanza is largely concerned with Mr. Jones's impersonation of various luminaries playing familiar roles from Shakespeare. I thought he was notably successful doing Marilyn Monroe as Ophelia, Tallulah Bankhead as Cleopatra (although he does an awful lot of Tallulah in the show), Mae West as Kate, Judy Holliday as Portia and Bette Davis as Lady Macbeth.

Strong Support

He virtually closes the show with an imitation of Katharine Hepburn as Rosalind, segues into Tallulah singing "I'll Be Seeing You," off-key, and finally doffs his wig in the traditional manner for the wind-up.

His fellow players, Betty Carr, John Smolko, Gaby Monet and Rod Strong are young and sprightly and entirely engaging on their own, working themselves into individual lathers while Mr. Jones makes his changes.

Last night's audience, hysterically partisan, almost screamed the rafters down at the merest motion of the star's wrist—but I doubt that the show will receive any such mad acceptance generally.

"Mask and Gown" is a skillful and often hilarious presentation of a brilliant mimic. Much of the humor and situations are highly specialized, however, and one wonders what will happen when the enlightened customers thin out. I wouldn't bet on it as a popular success.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

September 11, 1957

THEATER

'Mask and Gown'

By WALTER KERR

MR. LEONARD SILLMAN teed off the new Broadway season Tuesday evening by presenting Mr. T. C. Jones in a series of female impersonations called "Mask and Gown." The engagement is limited. So is Mr. Jones.

In point of fact, Mr. Jones is a bland, benign, and amiable performer, and he is, I suppose, a good female impersonator. His principal difficulty, it seems to me, is that he impersonates only two females.

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The first and most frequent of these is Tallulah Bankhead. As we noticed in the "New Faces" of a year or so ago, Mr. Jones has a barrelhouse laugh, a healthy stride, and an underslung lip that combine quite successfully to caricature that whiskey-voiced lady who has already, and often, caricatured herself.

In the present entertainment he reintroduces us to his victim by slouching into a television studio, his wig washing down over one eye and his special pout perpetually vibrating, to pit Miss Bankhead against a chain-smoking Bette Davis in one of those quiz shows. (Sketch-writer Ronny Graham has a rather fetching idea for this particular jest: the quiz is called "Your Money or Your Life" and the losing contestant just doesn't get any more oxygen pumped into that sealed booth). The Bankhead side of things is accurate, reasonably racy, and entertaining.

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But the other female Mr. Jones is able to manage isn't really Bette Davis. She is something of a composite, a slightly characterless creature with glistening eyes, rounded face, second chin, almost motherly smile, and gently composed hands. The hands can be adapted for smoking cigarettes, which means Bette Davis. The glistening eyes can be matched up with Judy Holliday's voice (this is one of the better combinations). The smile can be allowed to droop open, and this, with a wiggle added, becomes Marilyn Monroe. But in none of these cases is anything absolutely definitive or absolutely devastating arrived at. Mr. Jones is hinting, his hints are quite broad (he is not above creating Louella Parsons wholesale out of the long-since-retired "Marion never looked lovelier" gag), and the hints of act one are repeated in act two.

In the course of extending what is actually a sound night-club act into a full theater evening, Mr. Jones is also ill-advised, I think, in trying for what I took to be straight drama. The diseuse (it is mispronounced "disease" at one point in the proceedings) turns his (her) attention to the throaty heart-throb of "Ten Cents a Dance," lapses into a soap-opera monologue while threading the floor with an unwelcome partner, and ends with an apparently bona-fide quiver of the jaw muscles. I suspect that even the customers who were most whoopingly with Mr. Jones Tuesday evening found this one a bit of a stumbling block.

There are pleasantries that should be counted. The star's opening rapid-fire chatter ("the gown is a Diorbach") is light, glib, and agreeable, the business of introducing the next number while sweeping up the debris of the last is casual fun, and the pulsing neck of a French chanteuse is a decidedly sobering image.

In the supporting company, which bounds out to dance a bit now and then, Gaby Monet and John Smolko make something pleasant out of a movie bolero in which the partners smoke cheek to cheek. Rod Strong leaps off a piano stool for a lazily graceful interlude, and Betty Carr helps out with suitable grimaces in yet another rundown of the turgid 'twenties.

Mr. Jones changes gowns with admirable dexterity. It's the mask that pales noticeably over the two hours' traffic of the stage.

Daily Mirror

September 11, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN

T. C. Jones Stars In Intimate Show

If you happen to like the art of female impersonation, we can recommend T. C. Jones to you. For Jones is one of the most expert practitioners in that craft to appear hereabouts since the days of Julian Eltinge and Bert Savoy. He brings a remarkable sense of taste to most of his mimicry.

Jones made his Broadway bow in Leonard Sillman's "New Faces" last season, and won enthusiastic salutes from the aisle-sitters. That gave Sillman and Bryant Haliday the idea of presenting the satirist in an even more intimate show, "Mask and Gown," which opened Tuesday evening at the John Golden Theatre.

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THIS TIME HE'S assisted by Betty Carr, Gaby Monet, John Smolko and Rod Strong. The singing and dancing of these youngsters provides the star opportunity to change wigs, costumes, etc. They are accomplished and pleasant people, and add quite a bit to the proceedings. They even help Jones toss such items as roses, doughnuts, and powderpuffs into the audience.

That's when he is impersonating a musical comedy leading lady of the 20s. Before and later, he has fun doing amazingly accurate take-offs on Tallulah Bankhead, Bette Davis, Ethel Merman, Marilyn Monroe, Mae West, Judy Holliday and Katharine Hepburn. He is notably adept at giving you an impression of how these luminaries might tackle the Shakespeare heroines.

Sillman, aided by several scripters and musicians, has given the new arrival a gay note by framing it in a circus setting. The backgrounds are simple and effective. This permits Jones to get into the spirit of things as a femme big-top clown. If he doesn't watch out, John Ringling North will be offering him a job.

A majority of the first-nighters greeted Jones with robust applause. Judging by this, they were having a high time of it. And we found much of the evening enjoyable, too, for it is always intriguing to study the methods of a master showman. Jones is that. Make no mistake about it.

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BUT WE HAPPEN to be one of those fellows who can relish just so much of a good thing, be it crepes suzettes, filet mignon or T. C. Jones. And, for our money, two and a quarter hours of female impersonation — even though it be top flight—is likely to run as thin as consomme.

But you may be of a different mind. Perhaps Jones' artistry will divert you for the span of a full performance. His versatility, amiability and devastating flair for caricature are wonderful assets on any stage, but we know when we've had enough, when the wine of humor begins to lose its sparkle, even without the ministrations of a swizzle stick.